

P-FORM

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P-SPEAK

P FORM O PINION:

Z'EV Z'EN

Z'ev talked about playing in an art gallery to an audience in Chicago, U.S.A. affording him across the Atlantic and the freedom to do anything he wanted. he could not indulge himself to that audience. not beyond the fact that he had crossed the ocean, not yet ready to struggle with his own Americanisms as he saw it in the audience: whom he mistrusted, suspect in their motives. Had they come to seek an idol of the generation industrial, the clasp of random metal, his dangerous and even dirty past?

Z'ev in doubt rubbing his neck, a head tilted, squints of eyes trying to see what was before him, checking his watch to assure that time was passing.

Z'ev talked about his work in progress; that it was more traditionally ordered, organic and meditative in form and content, spiritual. that his work would not focus upon appearances or visual images, but would intend that each participant, through concentration even fixation upon the music,

could create deeper, more rich arrays of stimuli. He asked to perform in the absence of light, to flush surface thoughts away. to hide the face of the audience. this gave each person the chance to be alone with the performance, and with him or herself. a glaring hall light illumined Z'ev from the door window. the audience was not totally in the dark. he played to the mind's eye, rhythmic cycles of the one hand clapping. until he could relax no longer, until he asked for lights.

Z'ev talked about his many name changes as variable selves. he talked of the street scenes in Amsterdam and appearing on The Gong Show eight times, a favorite of Chuck Barris. In between talks, he played gongs and chimes in tympanic symphonies, metallic conjuring of other selves. a request of bell spirits, a full tone of darkness. he asked for the lights. Z'ev talked about the possibility of not having spoken, for his own benefit and that of the audience. relying on his own dark arts for communication. he could have trusted that his one hand clapping is sounded in the heads of listeners. patriots, and exiles alike. ○

by Su Montoya & Bob Whittinghill

LIN HIXSON

INTERVIEW

An Interview with Lin Hixson
2-11-86 by Brendan deVallance

Lin Hixson is a Los Angeles-based performance artist. Her primarily large-scale works are collaborative, and involve from eight to fifty performers. This past February she led a workshop at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and presented a performance with the students who participated.

B.deV. How do you define yourself? Do you consider yourself mainly a performance artist?

L.H. I consider myself an artist. I have never really called myself specifically a performance artist. I've been called that but I have not found a name for what I am.

In Los Angeles there's a whole dialogue going on now about the word performance art and even redefining a new word for this certain kind of work.

Because I direct, I've taken myself out of the work. What I do is develop the work with a group of people. I like to work with non-performers and with actors, but only a certain



Passing Through, a live performance/film by Lin Hixson & Jane Dibbell.

kind of actor who's going to let go of conventional things. My work has always been large scale and involved...5 to around 25 to 50 people. Since I've stepped out of it and called myself a director, the content is developed collaboratively and that is not yet in the language of performance art.

B.deV. When you do a performance, do you do a run or just one night events?

L.H.: I've done both. I've done quite a few pieces that are just one time things and the most I've ever run

IN THE PAST TEN YEARS CHICAGO HAS BEEN A MAJOR CENTER FOR THE EMERGENCE AND DEVELOPMENT OF PERFORMANCE ART. SEVERAL ALTERNATIVE SPACES, AS WELL AS VARIOUS NIGHTCLUBS, BARS AND THEATERS PROVIDE A FORMAT FOR PERFORMANCE ART AND PRESENT IT REGULARLY.

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WITH THIS RISE IN GENERAL POPULARITY COMES A GROWING NEED BY THE PUBLIC FOR INFORMATION ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING AND WHAT'S HAPPENED, ABOUT PERFORMANCE ARTISTS AND PERFORMANCE ART IN GENERAL. AND THERE IS A GROWING NEED BY THE ARTISTS FOR CRITICAL SUPPORT, AND EXPOSURE TO THE PUBLIC (BEYOND "REAL PEOPLE/RIPLEY'S BELIEVE IT OR NOT").

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a piece is 6 performances. It's another thing I'm not really comfortable with. The way we are trying to be marketed right now, I know there's a problem to figure out how to support yourself.

A lot of theaters in LA now are picking up performance artists and giving them runs so that more people can see their work. There is work that needs a run, but other work does not and I think you have to be careful.

I like the event quality of the one time thing, but I feel comfortable with certain pieces that I do 2 or 3 times.

HIXSON *continued*

But what my work is more about is being in this place at that specific time and having it happen once.

I'd much rather make my money teaching and still allow the work to have that kind of freedom.

B.deV.: What would you say, through your work, are your main concerns?

L.H.: My concerns have evolved. What I'm interested in now is still working collaboratively and bringing people together who do not necessarily have the same ideology at all.

The piece at SAIC was developed over 2½ days. Sometimes I've worked with people for 6 months.

When you bring 8 or 9 or 10 people together and work intensely, you don't talk about issues right away. What's interesting is that you usually get concerns that are influencing those people at that time and the pieces reflect that, and you start to understand what the issues are that you were talking about.

A space gives me a lot of content. Going to a train station or a loading dock or working outside in the snow in 10 degree weather today. I'm from LA so I come to Chicago and have people perform outside in the snow.

You really have to trust the work that you bring together. You don't have time to be really analytical when you're working collaboratively. Even though we haven't analyzed it, we hope it means something.

B.deV.: Would you say that performance art has changed drastically from when you began performing?

L.H.: I am going to speak from a Los Angeles point of view because that's where I've been for the last 10 years. In LA a lot of performance came out of the feminist movement and was very autobiographical. A lot of solo work was being done. It was intimate work and not for large scale audiences.

In the 80's the work has gotten much more high tech, it's gotten more support from theater. With the rise of Laurie Anderson and different things, more people started looking at Performance Art.

I originally started working collaboratively with a group of theater people, musicians and actors. It was interdisciplinary, and we ended up performing in a lot of contexts.

In LA, the visual art world and the dance world and the theater world were very separate and in the early 80's they started looking at each other and merging. I don't think this is true of New York at all; I think they're all piled one on top of another.

A lot of this work is really great but I think a lot of performance has gone into that grey area of bad theater, including myself. Now what I've done, I've had to go back and re-examine why I got into this area originally.

I think performance art, at least in LA is in some kind of crisis because a lot of it doesn't know what it is. And there is this battle between theater and performance art. Because there are so many genres in performance art.

The last thing I did in LA I got a lot of promotion and I was feeling these demands that it be slicker because it'd be a wider audience. There were 10 reviews and it ended up being not a very good experience for me. So I've gone back to why I originally was interested in it and that was my sculpture background and the collaborating and just being more free with it. And I think if you've been in it for awhile you should stay clear on these things--why you're doing it.

Do you know I'm working in a film with Darryl Hannah? There's a film coming out called Legal Eagles, it's got Robert Redford, Debra Winger and Darryl Hannah in it. Darryl plays a performance artist. It's the first time performance art goes to the big screen. There's a performance piece within the film. It's really a Spencer Tracy /Katherine Hepburn Adam's Rib type film, but there is a segment in the film where Darryl does a 1½ minute performance art piece. They tried to have her working in New York, they had her doing interpretive dance. And there's this man Arnie Glimpse who owns Pace galleries in N.Y. who's an associate producer on the film and he felt strongly that the performance art had to be represented in a responsible way. So they asked me to come in and work with Darryl on a performance piece. And I had a lot of reservations about it. But I did it and I've been working with her but in the end I'm still going to lose control because it's directed by the guy who directed Ghost Busters, Ivan Rhineman, and so that's where it's going to come down. But I decided that it is better to have somebody in there who knows about performance art. This is going to be the first time performance art is mentioned to a mass media audience. They decided, Ivan Rhineman director of Ghost Busters, has decided, to put a performance artist in a film that tells you where we're going.

B.deV.: The performance art piece in the film--is that written by you?

L.H.: I had to work a lot with Darryl and Darryl's very creative. But I really just worked with Darryl and I brought in a musician that I had worked with a lot and I demanded that they use him.

They want the film for a fundraiser for the Museum of Contemporary Art (Los Angeles). They want to open with that and have Darryl do the performance art piece before the film. The performance deals a lot with fire because it's a lot of imagery that she deals with in the film. And she tells a personal story (she deals with objects that she actually made and painted). And overall I feel good about it right now. How I'll feel about it in the film is another story. It's still

Darryl Hannah doing performance art. I think that it's going to be a real interesting time for performance art, to see what's going to happen with it.

I think performance art is a holistic language and I think that it's a language that's really relevant to this age, because it deals with so many different levels.

I think that in our daily lives we are going to have to be thinking in a faster way--a more holistic way. And I think that performance art is the one thing that is still on the cutting edge and it is undefinable. I can't define it. And I think that there is so much being thrown into the arena and there's so many arguments, so many dialogues going on about it and I think it's real interesting. So that's why I've stayed. I feel much more comfortable in that arena than I do in purely dance or theater. And performance hasn't gone narrow--it's spaced wider and wider.

I don't think this is going to make it into the film, but when Darryl Hannah brings Robert Redford into her loft, he says, "Well what do you do?" and she says, "I do performance art." and he says, "What's performance art?" And I keep thinking of it as this cult film where all of us can go in and say those lines "What's performance art?" because I've been asked that so many times. O

P - FORM

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questions/ANSWERS

Kevin Henry reviews Lynn Book

After the wheel was invented I'm sure there were a lot of barbarians kicking themselves for not having seen such a simple thing sooner. Galileo was condemned as a heretic by the Roman church for proposing that the earth revolved around the sun rather than vice versa. The yo-yo was first marketed in Cuba for fear its lack of sophistication might insult people here, and the hoola-hoop made a small killing for some small mind. Why do we keep inventing the wheel? Because it's round? The answer is a question - the question is an answer.

With the acceptance of the earth's roundness came the realization that a ship could be upside down and right side up at the same time, which certainly goes a long way toward explaining children digging to China; the shortest distance between two points is a straight line, according to some Greek. What does all this have to do with anything else? I'm not sure, really, but some questions keep us guessing and guessing. Lynn Book's "Because It's Round?" kept me guessing

for a long time, kept me interested for a long time, and kept me happy for a long time, and then that stopped.

It was a very adept balancing act involving dance, an elaborate sound score, and elements of theater. Performers were moved around as if they were words which if arranged correctly would form the lines of an elaborate and spiraling story (like a version of history itself?). The tone was gloomy, a brightly disguised dance of death that shifted from the airy movements of a choreographed ensemble to a 1984ish science lab where worldly objects were weighed, recorded, then discarded. A rogueish choir appeared intermittently in the balcony and four distraught dancers metamorphosed into "hand"-gun cowboys (as if this was how the West was won).

The ever-accelerating succession of images took a nose dive into the very mundane present - mundane because not enough curiosity had been stirred up to make it mythical; historical. The final image, which struck uncanny overtones of our recent fated space ship, was followed with a symbolic return to order, like the phoenix in a charred forest. In this version the phoenix was a performance artist and the forest was a toy pile - a very beautiful image, to be sure, but one which tried to

resolve so many beautiful questions, posed visually, with one clean contemporary sweep. The final image went too far in "explaining" that we are human, and we will drop out of the sky, and we will lift ourselves up and begin again - why? Because history repeats itself.

Answers to big questions come from a series of smaller ones, which seem even smaller once the large question is finally arrived at. I guess it's not the answer we're after as much as the process of arriving. In the case of this performance, the answer seemed so small that it made the earlier questions seem large in comparison. Lynn Book brought a play of questions to a close by answering it with a mythical re-enactment of a contemporary event, bringing it full circle. Yet such a strategy keeps the audience outside of that circle (like a media event?) making us wonder if "how" a question is asked is more important than "why" a question is asked. I always wondered why news media called "human interest" stories by that name - who is the rest of it intended for? Interesting question? "Because It's Round?" played MoMing on March 7 & 8, and included fine performances from Lynn Book, Mary Brogger, Sophia Anastasiou, and Allan Tollefson (the main cast). O



from Lynn Book's Because It's Round?

KAREN FINLEY

YAMS UP MY GRANNY'S ASS

by NANCY FOREST BROWN

In the two evenings she performed at Randolph Street Gallery, Karen Finley fanned the dying embers of controversy surrounding her work into a mid-size brush fire reminiscent of the mild conflagration following her Chicago debut in 1982 at The Room, where we were first introduced to the idea of "tuna in the vulva". Since that initial shock wave, Chicago audiences have become eager consumers of Finley's frantic vulgarities, no longer shocked by her introduction of new uses for food, or so it seemed. In fact, the work Finley presented here in the intervening years was not as tough as that initial piece,

as Finley explored the comedic possibilities of her "ranting mad woman" format and avoided ruffling delicate sensibilities by keeping her social commentary on the light side.

Throughout the performance, Finley presents two primary personas. Finley's performance persona is the "ranting evangelist/sorcerer" who, in a tone of fanatic possession, "testifies" to life's base realities, speaking as each character in a too human drama, but always speaking in one mad voice. Her second persona, whom we are expected to assume is Karen Finley, is casually intimate with the audience as though she's also an observer of the performance. The Karen character is shy and innocent about sex. She shares our hoped-for innocence as though to say "we aren't like these nasty people who abuse each other so mercilessly". Yet it's our identification with "Karen" that makes a claim to inno-

cence impossible. The distance between dirty secrets and fucking with door-knobs is just a matter of degree.

On a small two-foot-high stage Finley has placed a table/pedestal draped with colorfully patterned diaphanous fabrics. The stage/platform is ringed with white Christmas tree lights and decorated with a festive array of miscellaneous objects - a Cher album, some large stuffed animals, cheap cardboard fish, and other commercial party decorations. Finley's costume reflects the atmosphere of tacky festivity; she's wearing an assortment of nightie parts - sleaze-sheer nylon under a quilted satin robe and a satin hat, giving the impression of a quack sorcerer.

Finley introduces us to her set and props in the "Karen" role, explaining how each object will function. Showing us a can of artichoke hearts she says, "These are going to be

cont. next page

KAREN FINLEY continued

the tumors on the old woman's head. Just so you'll know." And explains that some props are decorations with no other purpose than to make the set "look nice".

Silence...then the sorcerer/evangelist launches into her piercing diatribe. We find ourselves in a world of ordinary people propelled by simple needs and desires to hideous excess. We are introduced to an amazing array of characters all suffering weaknesses of the flesh: the suburban woman who has "stopped giving intercourse" to her kids and whose husband fucks her with doorknobs; a woman who has "the bladder infection blues" from being fucked in the "wrong hole"; a mother who complains that her anorexic daughter upchucks all over the house - she has to pretend to the neighbors that it's the dachshund's vomit; a business-woman who takes a dwarf to work - he sucks on her under the desk while she sees the clients; an old woman with tumors coming out of her head, whose doctors drink the "tumor juice" to make their semen taste like honey; the subway rapist who is offended by his victim's being "on her period"; the little girl who is convinced by her girlfriend's father that if she doesn't suck the pee out of his congested penis it will back up to his brain and kill him... "That's how I found out that boy's pee is so different from girl's pee" (as Finley squeezes an armful of ice-cream bars and vanilla ice cream explodes down the front of her blouse).

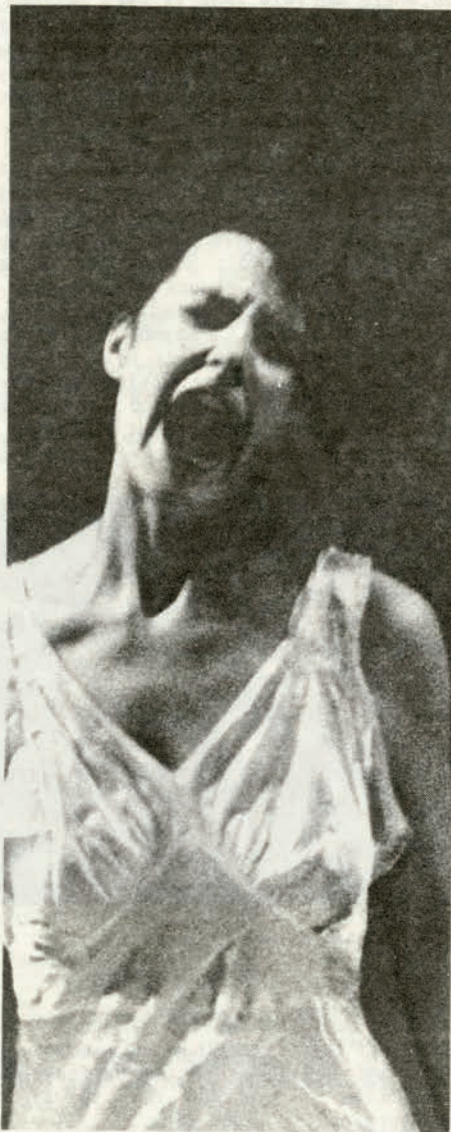
The various canned vegetables are used to punctuate the stories, adding to the sense of desperation and degradation. The pain becomes so palpable that Finley's moments of comic relief, where innocent "Karen" comments ingenuously on the material ("This is art isn't it? But where's the product?") are so necessary they become cathartic.

Throughout, Finley is relentless in her deromanticization of sex, insisting we recognize the pathetic reality of our absurd obsessions. Though humor spares us, we are never totally let off the hook. Finley accomplishes this formally by showing her absolute control of the moment, taking every opportunity to prove to us that everything that happens is part of her piece. When people leave during an especially disturbing discourse on an event in a nursing home, Finley comments, "They're leaving because they've got their grandma sitting in her piss in some nursing home."

Finley's discourse is tough, ridiculed with sexual colloquialisms and abusive behavior. The initial impression is that she intends to shock. Yet the language is nothing more than common American jargon and her use of food to press her point is shocking only in relationship to the content of her monologue.

Yams, kidney beans, and liver sausage are intended as nourishment. Yet when they are stuffed up her ass or smeared on her breast they

are metaphors for exploitation. Finley presents a world of good people, good food, and good intentions gone awry, debased by desperation and dissatisfaction in the face of abundance. She shows men and women alienated and at cross-purposes, misunderstanding each others intentions. The wife says "Oh I love the big dick ... and when I get my cheesecake just the way my husband likes it, he turns me over in the kitchen and gives it to me in the ass." To her husband adds (referring to the children) "When they say 'fuck you', I turn them over and fuck t' m in



Karen Finley

the ass. That'll stop their rhythmic shaking. If they want to shake, they can shake my dick after I piss." What is sex to one is violence to the other, an often repeated theme in Finley's work.

If we look beyond her no-holds-barred use of sexual jargon, we find the poetry of Karen Finley, juiced by its contemporary rap rhythms, yet painfully compelling in its expression of the human condition:

"Hank and I went into the nursing home. Ooo I mean we saw that ninety-three year old woman sitting in her piss, just sitting there in her stench

and she's nothing. I mean she's not worth doing nothing with. But then Hank smelled that piss a little more and it turned him on real good. So we took that old woman and we ripped her breast. We ripped that breast, we see her rosary made out of semi-precious stones. And I mean she got that kleenex with the spittle" ... (she becomes "Karen") "And talking about spittle, it's time for a spit (she spits, it hits a rose), I got it right on this (she picks up the rose), that's the reason why I got this (she puts the rose on the table). So we've got the ninety-three year old woman sitting in her piss and Hank is turned on by this old woman in her piss and he's got her upside down now, okay?" (she becomes the evangelist again)

"Ooo yeah, we got her upside down and we start working her oyster. We start looking down that brown gray black navy-blue meat of hers. We look down there and we see the meaning of life. We see death stories and war, we see religious experiences and karma, ooo we look down there and we're shivering; ooo and the old woman's crying cause she hasn't been touched since thirty-seven. Ooo tears from her eyes, she's just loving the touch of it all. She's just feeling the touch of it all. But then, what we were looking for was the nigger-whore woman, the nigger old granny with the warts all over her body. She got these warts and we got our razor blades and we pin her down on the floor and we take the razor blades and we start scraping the warts so we can get wart powder. Then we spit in the wart powder, about a handful, spit into it and make it into a nice wart paste. Then we put down our pants and we rub it all over our groin and our balls. Because our own granny told us if you get the wart paste off an old nigger hag, a nigger hag, a nigger haggy, then you know it makes you real hard for a long time and then we go up to 5 South and I mean we rape those women up there. We give 'em a real good good time, a real good, good good time, a real good good time."

We appreciate being considered intelligent enough to recognize how ludicrous human behavior can be, or we don't appreciate having it pointed out to us, or our own sexuality/sensuality is so repressed we can't bear to have it aired, or we appreciate the formal qualities of performance well done, or we envy her ability to render the formal qualities of performance so well, or we hate that her work offers no answers to monstrous human behavior, or we realize that art can do nothing to alter these conditions, or we are deeply touched by these people who go to such great lengths to connect but cannot, or we are alienated by the language. The controversy surrounding Finley's work can only be seen as subjective. Viewed objectively, the work is less controversial than it is disturbing, and whether our response is positive or negative we are powerfully affected. ○

BARBARA T. SMITH

by KATHRYN HIXSON

Sheer Cliffs and Natural Bridges

S.A.I.C.

Saturday, April 19, 1986

It wasn't the candles and incense, really. Nor the large Chinese dragon, operated by awkward students, chasing the artist around the space. The voice-over of the experience of a rape victim? Well, O.K. except for the shrill whistling accompaniment. But the fake primitive costumes and pat "ritualistic" dance movements, and the invoking of various mythologies, with lots of slides of "the Earth", started to trouble me. The excruciatingly slow timing (did we have to listen to all of the sexist Billy Joel song "I Am an Innocent Man"?) allowed time to really think about the bizarre datedness of the performance. When the student helpers came out of the audience to invite us to "join the circle", sniff incense and share some corn soup, that was it.

I did not levitate.

The impotency and regressive nature of Sheer Cliffs and Natural Bridges

by Barbara T. Smith elucidates in what ways feminism has been ineffectual, how psychology can divert action into passive acceptance, how history can be abused, how political causes can be deflated, and how artists can thoroughly fool themselves into thinking they are being meaningful. More disturbing than this anachronistic performance, though, is that much post-modernwork has not progressed much further than this early feminist position.

Feminists in the late '60's and early '70's made great strides forward in publicizing the female angst in feelings of submission, the body as humiliating sex object, and other various alienations in personal and social arenas. That these problems must still be addressed suggests that certain feminist strategies were ineffectual. Tasting one's own menstrual blood will not stop the Illinois Insurance Lobby from defeating the ERA, or make Calvin Klein ads any less exploitative. Frustration may have pushed Smith into trying (as stated in her program notes) "to find greater understanding for the human propensity for violence", desperately resorting to seek to "transform the world through these newly perceived dreams". In doing so however, she accepts the way things are. This basic masochism is still popular in works such as those of Karen Finley, who grovels gleefully in the submissive position. Debase or etherealize - nothing changes. Smith uses various pop psychologies, invoking "wholeness" and the "necessity of opposites" (also used by the Afrikaansers in South Africa). Scream therapy and getting to know one's self may help day to day existence, but do nothing to help solve the real economic and social contradic-

tions that cause the anxiety. These psychologies channel the conflicts inward, placing the guilt on the individual to assuage. Similar uses of mass psychology in fake cults render Smith's urge for open vulnerability suspect. The most telling and disturbing moment in this piece was in the rape victim voice-over: "a male friend of mine told me that perhaps the rape was the most important thing that ever happened to me. He said it made me strong".

The feminist re-searching of history for more statistics on women has substantially challenged the patriarchal hold on the formulation of history. However, Smith's random pickings from various mythologies, seeking to align her feminine self with these "primordial" powers, pathetically align her with the patriarchy, who love to pick, choose, and rewrite for their own good, conveniently forgetting the thousands of years between cultures. Questioning the ideas of originality, power, and authenticity through appropriation of past art forms is popular now, but dangerously straddles the fine line between criticism and complicity. Glorification or Hatred of the past, negation of the possibility of the new, always breeds complicity. Smith had the audacity to thank "Lynn Roberts from Cooper's Place, a Day Care Center for the Homeless People for coordinating to bring the group of homeless people who are with us tonight and who are a real and symbolic representation of the need to nurture all people..." A group of blacks and hispanics sat in a row in front of me. This belief in a communal role of art which transcends class boundaries is absurd today, and this gesture was terrifically condescending. Upper middle class white artists inviting ghettoites into elegant drawing rooms will not change their economic position, unless they have something trendy to sell. This is evident in other artists' work, so successful because their art speaks strictly to its yuppie audience (Laurie Anderson, Phillip Glass, Basquiat...). Conversely, the recent Artists for Nicaragua shows did not change Reagan's mind about giving military aid to the Contras, just as Judy Chicago's Dinner Party did little to equalize wages between men and women. The inability of art to directly cause political and social change is calmly accepted these days. Barbara Smith's attempts are sad testament to the failure of American Feminism to achieve the radical and utopian ideals that initiated the movement. Through critical examination of artistic failures in the socio-political arena, artists have become aware of the production of culture. Post-modern artists knowingly manipulate our perceptions of history, commenting on the inevitability of history in turn manipulating their art. Learning from the misguidance of work such as Smith's, artists can search beyond complicity toward work that addresses and critiques the culture, while still reaching beyond the strictures of the existing artworld. O

5 MINUTES

by STEVEN L. JONES

Nowhere is the sometimes uncomfortable collision of high and low art values more apparent than in contemporary performance art. And nowhere, in recent memory, has this schism been more clear than at "5 Minutes", an evening of seventeen five-minutes-or-less performance pieces by Chicago artists, held March 21 at the new Bedrock Gallery.

Performance art has always strived for a generally defined set of freedoms. It has sought to free artists from the questionable ethics and crass consumerism of the omnipresent art market. It has, by its attitudes and format, attempted to subvert the object-fixation of the art piece, so apparent in the cathedral-like art museums where material works are accorded a status that seems to demand awe from the viewer. To many artists these conventions are hopelessly superficial and stifle the impulses of expression and transcendence. Similarly, performance art has been at war with the aesthetic constraints that keep art and life seemingly separate; it has, in a natural and successful way, narrowed Rauschenburg's famous "gap between art and life." Subsequently, performance art is for many people the most contemporary art form - the most vital and appropriate for our time.

But throughout its relatively brief history, these admirably idealistic goals have not been pursued without difficulty. The abandonment of traditional aesthetics can engender undisciplined work that is ultimately ineffectual. By debunking high art's seriousness and object-fetishism, the resulting work can be lazy, self-indulgent, or little more than a fine art version of vaudeville or rock-and-roll: fine only in its context, and consequently unjustifiable as art.

The genre has also fulfilled many artists' need for a "scene"; a loosely-formed community of doers and watchers, a means for channeling energies and setting up a network of places to go and show that is more exciting and constructive than the traditional cocktail-party-as-opening-reception. A performance needs a place to happen and people to experience it. Its very liveness, its elements of spontaneity, risk, and radical experimentation have always nurtured such a scene (one need only remember the Cabaret Voltaire, the casually staged Happenings in New York lofts, Warhol's non-stop art-party-as-art, or the Situationist-inspired underground movement of punk rock).

"5 Minutes", curated by Randy Alexander, was conceived, billed, anticipated, and experienced as an "event"; an event that was most definitely part of a "scene." Many of Chicago's talented young performers were there, and a cursory survey of the large crowd revealed many familiar faces. The atmosphere was comfortably seedy:

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5 MINUTES continued

beer flowed, smoke filled the air, and an eclectic selection of pop tunes blared between pieces (I caught Arthur Brown's "Fire", as well as "Banana Boat" and the "Doby Gillis" theme ... so the music was boss). The atmosphere of cabaret-style kitsch was smartly played up by Alexander who even did a stint as Monty Hall, returning five people's admission charges for various objects found in purses and pockets. This was to be Chicago performance art's "Gong Show", and the crowd knew it (and wanted it) from the moment they arrived. The quality was expected to be high, or at least entertaining. And so long as the viewer's expectations went no higher than this, there were very few disappointments. As Robert Daulton crooned at the close of his performance "Don't take it so serious/ Life is too mysterious."

Inevitably, there were a couple of outright klunkers. Joelle Peterson and Steve Griego's attempts to evoke exotic mystery by writhing about under the guise of modern dance, augmented by an artillery of Oriental percussion, were mostly mystifying in their pretentious conception and execution. Somebody's Daughters, three women who chatter incessantly in a "parody" of laundromat bimboism, may have been an appropriately titillating opening act (they were "erotic" underwear and flash a lot of leg), but the trio's refusal to interject any kind of social commentary into their well-executed imitations is disappointing; they simply document a social archetype and a lifestyle without questioning it or even making any particularly interesting observations about it. One is left feeling as empty as the consumerized, alienated world one assumes they are satirizing.

Happily, these performances formed the evening's nadir. A few of the artists, particularly Joel Klaff, Brendan deVallance and Robert Daulton, all of whom have done interesting work in the past, seemed a bit stale. Klaff, whose appearance as a Warhol-esque, mod super-starlet was a fine goofy image, couldn't match his visuals with his monologue - a somewhat predictable tirade about the art scene. Daulton's and deVallance's signature styles felt a little too familiar. It was disappointing to see such imaginative young performers flirting with formularization, a practice that can quickly degenerate into unintentional

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self-parody. But even these shortcomings were not detrimental to the performances, or the evening as a whole.

In response to the imposed time limit and the necessity of quick "set" or technical breakdowns, most of the artists opted for simple approaches. Monologues were popular, and most were humorous or thoughtful. Mark Anderson attempted to perform mundane actions (moving a chair, sitting on it, standing, changing facial expressions) while his tape-recorded voice bombastically described, in the past tense, the performance he was presently executing. The result was a very funny, sometimes scathing parody of performance art and its often megalomaniacal documentation.

In "Bovary's Ovaries", Matthew Owens delivered an hysterically sarcastic rant about class and sex systems, instructing the audience to consider "romanticism as hygiene" and "bourgeois mediocrity as a venereal disease," while he drew illustrations on a giant balloon which was all the while inflating larger and larger. Audience anticipation of the inevitable explosion was tense and comical. Moments like these, when the performance broke through theatrical barriers and allowed the audience a more direct mental and physical involvement with the art, were among the highlights of the evening.

Charlie Krohe, who delivered a wonderful deadpan series of absurd images and situations, appeared at the close of his piece as a sort of Devo-ish John Denver. While he strummed the opening bars of a folk song on an acoustic guitar and prepared to sing, a stage-hand tried to light sparklers that sprouted from a wok Krohe wore as a hat. The attempt was hilariously prolonged when the sparklers refused to light, and a spectator, armed with Bic lighter, helped out. Others shouted advice, and one man (ironically Bill Harding, the performance artist-cum-folk singer who sells grass suits) stole a moment from the spectacle by lighting his cigarette from the stage flames. Krohe strummed on and on, waiting. It was a fine example of those rare moments in performance when the medium's inherent anything-can-happen-and-should quality permits the viewer's direct involvement with the work that is literally in progress. Joseph Beuy's and Allan Kaprow's dreams of a non-elitist, life-affirming art

were evoked in a very pedestrian but warm fashion, as the sparklers finally lit and drew cheers from the audience.

Visual spectacle and spectacular visuals, particularly those dealing with sexuality and death, were not, however, unpopular. Susan Wexler's dream-like "Lavanderia, Ecdysiast From Beyond the Grave" - a strip-tease of fluorescent bones under blacklight, and performed to a funky-up version of "Nearer My God To Thee" - was very beautiful in its melancholy strangeness. The campy outrageousness of "L-n-L", wherein a punkish drag queen (seemingly right out of Jack Smith's "Flaming Creatures") alternately pleaded for and demanded sex from another flamer who crawled around on all fours, transcended mere vulgarity by making the sexual debasement of human beings (especially sado-masochism) funny in the darkest way. Hysterical laughter was contrasted, familiarly but effectively, with hysterical anxiety.

And SXPU's "Butt Bongos" was a really boffo example of the power that the simplest of images and ideas can generate. In "Butt Bongos", basically a one-joke slapstick routine, the elegantly dressed men of SXPU mooned the entire audience while their equally elegantly dressed women played their asses like a row of very pale congas. It was a smart fuck-you gesture with the delightful added twist of making men into material objects for women's entertainment instead of the usual vice-versa. One could almost feel the sting as the cheeks got redder and redder, and however crudely the gesture was articulated the point was taken. And amiably, at that.

"5 Minutes" was a success. It served its function as an event, and allowed a loosely-related congregation of performers and patrons to have a laugh with their enlightenment at no one's expense but their own. Like so much of this century's art, it exemplified a grafting of "high" and "low" creative values, referring to culture as it simultaneously became an expressive part of the same. When mass media and "entertainment" become as omnipresent and influential as they are today, their use as an artistic resource is not only inevitable but necessary if art is to stay even nominally true to modern life. O

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calendar

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| <p>1-4 LUCINDA CHILDS & COMPANY MoMing 7:30 pm May 1 & 4 8:30 pm May 2 & 3 \$12/\$10</p> | <p>Dancer/choreographer Childs and her 11-member company will present on May 1 & 2 <u>Portraits and Reflections</u>, a collaboration with photographer Robert Mapplethorpe; and on May 3 & 4 <u>Field Dance II</u>, an excerpt from <u>Einstein on the Beach</u>, on which she worked with Robert Wilson and composer Phillip Glass.</p> |
| <p>2,3 LAWRENCE STEGER Randolph Street Gallery 8 pm; \$3/\$2</p> | <p>Chicago artist Steger presents a new piece, <u>The Marriage Or Story of Sisters</u>, which examines the relationship of four siblings by exposing their individual psychologies.</p> |
| <p>3 JEFF ABELL, ROBERT DAULTON, LOREL JANISZEWSKI Chicago Art Network 8 pm; \$6/\$4</p> | <p>New works by 3 experienced Chicago performance artists. <u>We'll Be Right, Back</u>; <u>Love</u>; and <u>Titled</u>, respectively, will be presented, followed by a discussion with the artists led by Art Encounter, an art education organization.</p> |
| <p>2,9 PERFORMANCE: CHICAGO State of Illinois Building Basement Auditorium 6 pm; \$3.50/\$2.50</p> | <p>The State of Illinois Art Gallery, the MCA and The Renaissance Society sponsor 3 highly varied Chicago performers: Tom Jaremba with Cocteau's play <u>Orphee</u>; Miroslaw Rogala's video performance <u>Remote Faces</u>; <u>Outerpretation</u>; and Brendan deVallance's <u>NoosePaper</u></p> |
| <p>9 DARK BOB Randolph Street Gallery 8 pm; \$5/\$4</p> | <p>Dark Bob returns to Chicago with his new piece, <u>Uncontrollable Love</u>, his solution to personal and political alienation.</p> |
| <p>9,10 E.W. ROSS MoMing 8:30 pm; \$7.50/\$5</p> | <p><u>Making Performance Art</u> is an evening of educational entertainment with E.W. Ross and Patricia Pelletier, who will preface an actual performance with an in-depth explanation of the creative process.</p> |
| <p>15-17 SQUAT THEATRE Briar St. Theater 8 pm May 15, 8:30 pm May 16,17 \$10/8 May 15, \$12/9 May 16,17</p> | <p>The New York group, with its origins in guerilla and experimental theatre, will perform <u>Dreamland Burns</u>, a multi-media presentation including the use of film, live actors and statues. Sponsored by the Museum of Contemporary Art.</p> |
| <p>16,17 LAURELL SERLEGH, LOREL JANISZEWSKI, BONNIE BLANK, KATHRYN HIXSON Chicago Filmmakers 8 pm; \$5/\$4</p> | <p>New performance and sound art by 4 Chicago artists. Curated by Jeff Abell.</p> |
| <p>24 JOHN HASKELL Randolph Street Gallery 8 pm; \$3/\$2</p> | <p>Haskell will present his new work, <u>Hell is a Million Degrees</u>. In 3 inter-related monologues he humorously examines the underlying socio-political structures which affect our lives.</p> |
| <p>29 HUDSON, BRENDAN DEVALLANCE DAVID STEVENSON, JANET QUINN Links Hall 8 pm; \$3</p> | <p>Performance art and poetry by 4 Chicago artists.</p> |
| <p>30 BATTLE OF THE ONE-MAN BANDS Randolph Street Gallery 8 pm; \$4/\$3</p> | <p>An open competition in commemoration of Memorial Day, featuring several categories of action, adventure, and prizes. Party to follow.</p> |

BRIAR ST. THEATER
3133 N. Halstead
348-4000

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118 N. Peoria
829-3915

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6 W. Hubbard
329-0854

LINKS HALL
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281-0824

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